

Tempo

De Borchgrave, correspondent: The last world 'soldier'

By Douglas Martin

ARNAUD DE BORCHGRAVE has earned his world-weary smile. As chief foreign correspondent for Newsweek he has covered 17 wars, suffered 3 combat wounds, and slept on more airport floors than he cares to remember.

He has built a global reputation by filing dispatches from more than 80 countries and hounding scores of world leaders into giving exclusive interviews. He claims his talks with Mideastern leaders have narrowed the gaping differences between Israel and Arab nations, hastening the cause of peace. And he matter-of-factly discloses that former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is in the habit of calling across the Atlantic to ask his opinion on assorted international issues.

No wonder the elegantly tailored native of Belgium ("he dresses better than most foreign ministers," a friend says) can't dispute Edward A. Kosner, editor of New York magazine and former editor of Newsweek, who calls him a "world-class correspondent." Or Osborn Elliott, another former Newsweek top editor, who says, "I don't see any others around doing what he's doing."

"I'M PART OF a dying breed," says De Borchgrave, 53, whose flair for the dramatic shows up in flamboyant expositions of bravery (upon returning from one of his seven tours of duty in Viet Nam, he eagerly displayed a bullet-riddled helmet to colleagues in Newsweek's Madison Avenue headquarters), and the care with which he maintains his handsome suntan. (He is said to carry a sun reflector and an assortment of lotions wherever he travels.)

Inevitably, this dapper chap with the ramrod posture and precise articulation has assumed the quality of a legend in certain journalistic quarters. New York Times executive editor A.M. Rosenthal, for instance, calls him "extremely brave."

"Maybe the great foreign correspondents are like great tenors," Kosner muses. "You only need one every 20 years." As if to underline this point, Esquire magazine is preparing a major article on De Borchgrave tentatively titled "The Last Foreign Correspondent."

The man's uniqueness is apparent from that title. At a time when first-class travel and unlimited expense accounts are merely a memory to most journalists, the self-described "lone-wolf operator" has a virtually unlimited franchise to fly anywhere in search of a big international story. Seldom is he asked to send New York those mountainous memos of mostly unused detail that are the endless bane of the newsmagazine reporter's life.

"They've let me do my own thing, call my own shots," De Borchgrave says. "And that's why so many people in this business say I've got the best job in the business. And, frankly, I think I do."

DESPITE OCCASIONAL attempts by Time magazine (which De Borchgrave dismisses as "Brand X"), it isn't a job that is likely to be duplicated. Indeed, there exists evidence that the traveled, timeworn species called foreign correspondent — renowned for striding through the Paris fog or a chilly Moscow night to interview yet another world leader or shadowy spy — is itself gradually disappearing.

Though recent statistics aren't available, the number of full-time American media representatives abroad dropped from 929 to 676 during the first half of the 1970s. In Chicago, the widely respected Daily News foreign service bit the dust in 1976, two years before the death of the newspaper; its demise left The Tribune the only local paper with its own regular foreign correspondents.

In large measure, the diminished number of overseas news sleuths reflects runaway costs. Time estimates it will spend an average of \$200,000 this year to maintain each of its 34 foreign correspondents, a 245 per cent increase from



Flamboyant foreign correspondent Arnaud de Borchgrave has a habit of turning up in the most dangerous spots.

• 10 years ago. The Los Angeles Times figures its annual cost at \$150,000 a year, up from about \$40,000 15 years ago.

Of course, the public's recent fascination with events in Iran and Afghanistan could prompt news executives to disregard soaring expenses, and indeed, television already is expanding its coverage of overseas developments; witness ABC's popular nightly report on the Iranian hostage crisis. The demands of cable television and other emerging video markets also may spark a larger appetite for documentaries about foreign subjects.

BUT THERE IS scant doubt that the dashing, heroic foreign correspondent is fast fading in this McLuhanesque era of cool professionalism. Almost gone are the real-life examples of the character played by Joel McCrea in Alfred Hitchcock's movie "Foreign Correspondent" — those trench-coated types with the beautiful blond in tow who bravely smash enemy spy rings, saving the free world.

In part, changes in family life have sapped enthusiasm for overseas assignments. Maynard Parker, Newsweek executive editor, says that because of the increase in two-career families, "Fewer people are willing to become expatriates."

And perhaps more important, the post-Watergate rage for investigative reporting has made staying at home more professionally alluring.

"People go over three or four years, and then they're dying to come back to this country to become Woodward and Bernstein," says De Borchgrave, who contends that years of

assiduous work (33 in his case) are needed to develop useful foreign contacts.

"They want to come back to where the action is, and the action is in the United States and in exposing skeletons in people's closets," he says. "Not only is that more fun, it's the shortcut to success."

ANOTHER SHORTCUT to success is to be born a count. De Borchgrave, who is fluent in five languages, was born into the glittery world of European royalty. His full name and title: Arnaud Paul Charles Marie-Philippe Comte de Borchgrave d'Altena, Comte du Saint Empire, Baron d'Elde-ren, Seigneur de Bovalingen de Marlinne, et d'autres lieux.

His irreverent Newsweek colleagues conveniently shortened this appellation to "the short count," in reference to his less than awesome height. They persist in the nickname, despite the fact that he long ago renounced his title to become an American citizen.

He also has taken considerable ribbing for his penchant of turning up in dangerous spots wearing the combat fatigues of some army or other. Elliott once called him "Mr. Hot Shot White Silk Scarf" after a particularly perilous mission in Viet Nam — an on-the-scene account of the vicious battle for Hill 400 near the Demilitarized Zone.

The dangers often have been real. For example, in 1973, De Borchgrave journeyed to the front lines with an

Continued on following page

